1794. e. 39.
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A

DEFENCE,

&c.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.]

Printed by S. Gosnell,
Little Queen Street, Holborn.

&c.

DE EZ CE

A

DEFENCE

OF THE

PROFESSION

OF AN

ACTOR.

"Wherever Virtue and Wiſdom are actually found, they have, in whatever ſtate, condition, profeſſion, or trade, the paſſport of Heaven, to human place and honour." BURKE.

LONDON:

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1800.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DEFENCE

DEDICATION.

TO

MRS. SIDDONS.

MADAM!

I TAKE the liberty of putting this little tract into your hands, that it may have a probable chance of being perused by a Lady, the supreme capability of whose talents has exhibited, in their highest excellence, the powers of the Stage. The bright path in the career of life, which the stedfast step of Mrs. SIDDONS has irradiated, will make evident to every eye, the truth which animates these pages.

I will not offer any apology for the subject I have chosen: its justice rejects one. I throw down the gauntlet; those who

possess

poſſeſs greater ſtrength may, perhaps, prove its champion, and win the victory.

I have not the honour of being of the Profeſſion which I have attempted to defend; yet I hope its reinſtatement, and to ſuch a conſummation do I moſt devoutly look.

I have preſumed, Madam! to inſcribe this with your name, notwithſtanding I ſhall not ſubſcribe it with my own. I have too ſincere an affection for the cauſe that I have eſpouſed, to venture its ruin, by the knowledge of either the notoriety or obſcurity of its friend.

I have the honour to remain,

MADAM!

Your moſt reſpectful,

And humble ſervant,

THE AUTHOR.

LONDON,
March 1, 1800.

A

DEFENCE,

&c. &c.

IN the defence of Poesy, and on the importance of Painting, we have had the names of a Sidney and a Reynolds; in praise of Music, a Beattie. But in defence of the matchless art of identifying the ideas of the Poet and of the Painter what champion have we beheld? While the dramatic writer has been crowned with the greenest wreath by the hands of an applauding world, the wondrous genius which has imparted life to his scenes, which has animated his portraits, and given resistless energy to his thoughts, is rewarded, it is true, with laurels; but those laurels are steeped in a poison more deadly than the

waters of Notacris. We admire the Drama while we proſcribe its ſupporters. We applaud the Actor while we ſhun the man. It ſhall be my inquiry into how far this practice is unjuſt. It ſhall be my effort to prove that it is ſo.

Proceeding ſyſtematically, I ſhall firſt give a ſummary hiſtory of the ſtage, to evince the conſequence in which it has been held by almoſt every ancient legiſlator. Secondly, I ſhall endeavour to demonſtrate its excellent effects (when properly regulated) upon the morals of ſociety. And, thirdly, to prove the illiberality, folly, and malevolence of that odium which has been affixed, even in this equalizing age, to the title of a Player.

The Drama received its birth amid religious feaſts and rural feſtivities. The happy completion of the vintage, and the plaudits of Bacchus, were ſung by her in the homely language of ruſticity. The luxuriant ſhade of the unburthened vines, formed the ſoft ſhelter of her ſimple theatre, while her youthful hopes deſired no

richer ſtage than the freſh graſs of the Icarian ſoil. Theſpis ſoon ſeduced her from her groves, to be a wanderer in his itinerant cart, about the ſtreets of Athens. But Eſchylus, penetrating through her Doric veil, reſcued her from diſgrace, waſhed the ſatyric lees from her forehead, and preſented her fair and educated to his countrymen. The Athenians, ſmitten by her charms and youthful wiſdom, erected in the midſt of their city an auguſt temple, in which they enſhrined her as a goddeſs.

Eſchylus, with the ſpirit of a ſoldier who had fought bravely in the glorious battles of Marathon, Salamis, and Platæa, transfuſed into his plays the heroes of Homer; transforming the humorous drolls of the early drama into the majeſtic promulgators of magnanimity and truth. Having thus opened the ſources of virtue upon his brother citizens, he retired into Sicily, and there paſſed his old age in the boſom of friendſhip with Hiero of Syracuſe, that widely inconſiſtent king, who, while he acted as a tyrant, yet ever eſteemed the grandeur of the mind as the only true

foundation of greatneſs. Eſchylus died with Hiero; and as ſome tribute to the man whoſe birth amongſt them they conſidered a glory, the ſtate of Athens paid to his name and works, honours which are ſtill recorded by their moſt revered hiſtorians.

Sophocles trod quickly on the footſteps of his maſter. He alſo had commanded armies, and now ſought to mingle with the warrior's laurel the "*poet's bays*." So high was his dramatic fame, that kings condeſcended to ſolicit his ſociety.

Euripides, the illuſtrious cotemporary of the foregoing two, left the ſtudy of philoſophy, which he had drank in even from the lips of Anaxagoras, for the milder ſprings of Poetry. The court of Macedon had the honour of retaining him while alive, and of entombing him when dead. They repulſed the ambaſſadors of Athens, which ſent many deputations, claiming the body of its deceaſed citizen; and erected over his remains a ſuperb ſarcophagus,

phagus, nearly on the edge of the fountain Arethuſa.

With this luminous triumvirate, alſo appeared Chronides, Phormis, and Epicharmus, the fathers of comedy. The two latter entirely dropped the antiquated ribaldry and deſultory ſarcaſms which uſed to load the incongruous chorus of their predeceſſors, and threw into a regular plan of dialogue thoſe characters in the commonwealth whoſe public peculations or private crimes rendered their conduct a ſubject of general ſcrutiny and effectual harm.

Phormis was preceptor to Gelo, the king of Sicily's ſon. And Suidas informs us that Epicharmus appeared firſt as a philoſopher; but the tyrant compelling him to ceaſe teaching the Pythagorean doctrine in the ſchools, he then caſt its principles into verſe, and rehearſed it himſelf upon the public ſtage. This device ſucceeding on the minds of his audience, he diffuſed its ſpirit through his comedies; and it has often been repeated, that Plato

imbibed

imbibed much wiſdom from the ſtudy of theſe dramas.

Ariſtophanes continued, as his progenitors, to laſh the age; and he did it ſo ſeverely, that the legiſlature at length thought it well to ſtop the boldneſs of his ſatire. But the poet eluded the vigilance of the magiſtrates by affixing fictitious names to real characters, and thus rendered the cenſure a ſtronger caſtigation, by ſhowing that the man, though hidden beneath a maſk, could be acknowledged by the nice ſimilitude of his vice or folly.

Menander, in after-times, threw a deeper diſguiſe over this neceſſary cauſtic, by attacking all the prominent evils of the age through the medium of ideal perſonages; without aſſailing individual perſons, he expoſed their crimes; and thus by his perception of human nature, rendered his plays more ſalutary than thoſe of his predeceſſors. The mind feels indignant at being diſrobed to public notice. It will apply leſſons to itſelf which are not evidently directed to itſelf, and forced by the acclaiming

acclaiming of a malicious world. This circumſtance ſummons pride againſt virtue; and, alas! the firſt is too firmly fixed in the mortal breaſt, ever to be called without proving conqueror.

The Roman drama was alſo the offſpring of woods and fields. It drew its firſt breath in Etruria, amidſt the rough jeſts and ſwilled jollity of Feſcinnia. In Rome it received a more poliſhed nature, and, under the name of Satyræ, aſſaulted with ſpirited raillery the follies of the people.

Livius Andronicus, and Plautus, were to Italy what Ariſtophanes was to Greece. And Terence, the energetic, the graceful Terence, poured through the Latin tongue all the force and ſweetneſs of Menander.

Upon the ſubverſion of the Roman empire by the Barbarians of the North, the vaſt influx of brutality and dulneſs drove the Muſes from their throne. The Drama fled with them. Savage auſterity and monaſtic dreams ſeemed to have uſurped the cheerfulneſs

cheerfulneſs of Wiſdom, and the enlightened language of her ſons. The buffooneries of the Theſpian cart again returned; and ſo continued, to the diſgrace of common ſenſe and decency, till in England they were put down by royal mandate, in the reign of Edward III.

The miſchief was not yet rectified. To the ribaldry of theſe vagabonds ſucceeded the dramatizing of the myſteries of religion and morality. The ſacred characters of the Saviour of mankind and his apoſtles were daily burleſqued and profaned, until the aſcending glory of Jonſon and Shakeſpeare roſe upon the horizon. Day now opened upon the world; genius flamed in the firmament; and the whole earth heaved to imbibe the vivifying warmth which exhaled fragrance from its boſom, and ſpread the wide univerſe with verdure.

Vanbrugh and Southern, with Farquhar and others, caſt a dangerous ſhadow over the theatre. The violence which they have uſed to the ſoft nature of the Muſe has been falſely and ſtupidly imputed to be

the

the effect of her own propenſities. It is not the genius of the Drama to be immoral. The evil ariſes from the unhappy influence of thoſe beings, whoſe titles of rank ought to be a never ſilent memento of the cauſe and end of their elevation. When kings and princes are the votaries of vice, we cannot be ſurpriſed, however we may regret, that they will ſacrifice the moſt precious things in their country to the Moloch of their adoration. Charles the Second, with ſuch men as Buckingham and Rocheſter, corrupted in themſelves, extended the malignant ſtream to the people, and forced it on the ſtage.

In oppoſition to theſe traitors to the empire of morality, Addiſon and Steele, with Rowe, Thomſon, and later writers, have given tragedies and comedies to the world, worthy to aſſert the majeſty of principle. Vigorouſly as theſe authors have ſtruggled on the ſide of purity, it would be well if the public, who are ſo eager to denounce the vice of the Theatre in general, would, in the particular inſtances of its attempts in virtue, ſupport thoſe attempts with up-

lifted arms, inſtead of wearying at ſcenes, however moral, which are not laden with bombaſt and pageantry.

The emperor Antoninus, in principle, was a diſciple of Zeno, as ſevere as Cato the Cenſor: yet who will deny that he poſſeſſed thoſe gentler virtues which ſeemed perfectly unknown to the republican? The Cenſor proſcribed the Muſes. The Monarch ſpeaks of the moſt potent of them thus: "Tragedy received its birth from a deſire to remind men of the ſeveral accidents attendant on mortal man; and to forewarn them, that ſimilar events may happen to themſelves; alſo to teach mankind, that thoſe miſeries which form their amuſement when feigned on the ſtage, ought not, when real, to be deemed inſupportable, in the grand theatre of the world."

Ariſtotle, too, ſpeaks loudly in approbation of the Drama: its power over the heart and manners is exalted, in his eſtimation, even higher than the effects of the ſublimeſt didactic philoſophy.

If Plato excluded the Stage from his ideal commonwealth, epic poetry was involved in the ſame cenſure. The reaſon he offers is this: "Epic and dramatic writers give us no picture of a wiſe man's character; they do not pourtray the tranquillity of mind which enables him to maintain a ſerene temper, undiſturbed by pleaſure or pain." But it is not ſuch a portrait of human nature that will ſtimulate the frail to copy. The example is too dazzling. It is a "*bright and particular ſtar*," but "*not in their ſphere.*" They do not meet any correſponding point in their own breaſts which aſſimilates with the philoſopher. Show them a man wreſtling with the vehement paſſions of nature. Let them view his rebellious wiſhes, his mental combats; and the ſympathy of each agitated heart partaking the ſtruggle, will rejoice in the conqueſt; they will ſee their own frailties in the frailties of the hero, and in his victory underſtand the ſleeping energies which they themſelves hold.

We read principles of good; we approve them; we regiſter them in the head, and

lay them aſide ready to be recalled on an emergency. But precepts which are ſpoken by a character whom we behold; by one, whoſe virtues demand our reſpect; whoſe ſufferings, our compaſſion; and whoſe ſweetneſs, our love: theſe ſtrike to the heart, ſink deep to its inmoſt folds, and are as living centinels to our honour, eager to ruſh forward as auxiliaries to thoſe virtues militant which gave them entrance. What the heart receives exiſts for ever: its ſtation is the ſource of life: it drinks from the fountain. The gueſts of the head alone may live for a time; but in that cold and comfortleſs region the primeval fires expire, and all, perhaps, which will remain, is the empty being of the fabled echo—a mere unimpreſſive ſound.

Many are the vices and follies of the degenerate mind, which not having been taken within the cogniſance of the laws, are, therefore, out of the juriſdiction of the civil magiſtrate. Contemptible as many of theſe errors may at firſt appear, after a ſhort recollection of the minute but gradually accumulating circumſtances, which

have generally forerun the fall of even the greateſt empires, no one will be ſo blind as to ſay, Let them be overlooked!

It is the numerous individuals of a country which, conſolidated, form a public. Allow to each man the quiet growth and exerciſe of his peculiar vice or folly, and what would be the reſult? Anarchy. An anarchy, though, for want of power, not ſo ſtormy and extended as the uproar of Milton's devils, yet experience has fatally ſhown how far it can tranſcend them in wickedneſs and ruin.

The effects of theſe vices, from their Proteus nature, make them impoſſible to be bound in any code of human reſtrictions. A mortal legiſlator can ſtrike no deeper than the ſurface. It is only a divine Judge that can purſue Sin, and tear her from the ſecret citadel of the heart. The ſympathetic chord which the all-wiſe Deity has woven in the boſom of man, to unite the will of God with the erring wiſhes of a finite creature, is conſcience. This ſacred ſtring deſcends from heaven to

earth,

earth, and ever vibrates with the voice of wiſdom; that we may not ruſh unwarned upon the deſtruction we ſolicit. Every ſpecies of exceſs, whether it be annexed to the character of the miſer, the libertine, or the more diffuſive voluptuary, can be reached through this avenue, and transfixed by the ſhafts of the Drama.

Law cannot follow the various doublings of avarice, envy, licentiouſneſs, and ingratitude; there conſcience raiſes the curtain; and witneſſing his own diſtorted ſoul reflected in the imitated actions of ſome fancied wretch, the real villain ſhrinks with horror from himſelf, and gives ſome weak wiſhes to the virtue he has deſpiſed. That this is no falſe hypotheſis, how many inſtances might be brought forth! So potently did the power of acting work upon the iron heart of a tyrant, that Alexander of Pherea, on ſeeing a tragedy of Euripides performed, went out before it was finiſhed, ſaying, "that he contemned himſelf for ſhedding tears over the only imitated woes of Hecuba, when he could every day, unmoved,

moved, command to his people the birth of real ſorrows.

Deſcending from the ſublimer heights of the Tragic Muſe, we may view from her ſiſter, conſequences more univerſally efficacious. Kings and ſtateſmen form but a ſmall group in the vaſt map of mankind: their numbers are few, and they act in a confined area. But the untitled citizens of the world ſpread a ſubtle influence through the air, and breathe upon a theatre which is only circumſcribed by the limits of the globe. The ordinary minds of men are moſt addicted to crimes of a meaner ſtamp; crimes which rather bear affinity to the name of knave than villain; yet though ſo ſoftened, they are not the leſs deſtructive; for the contagion creeping from man to man, gathers freſh poiſon in every paſſage, and at laſt corrupting the whole maſs, makes its ruin inevitable. To expoſe them is the province of Comedy. She ſmiles at the "*drawn dagger*;" and laughs from the affections of men, the foibles which diſgrace their nature. By holding up certain vices to ridicule, the vanity of the man is wounded,

wounded, and vanity is an inherent mover in almoſt every breaſt. Thus one paſſion is played againſt another; and though the means may be deemed below the dignity of the grave moraliſt, the dramatic poet may call to his aid what forces he pleaſes.

There is one effect, which alone ought to cauſe an approval of the Stage. We ſee children in a ſtate of tranquillity, ſeemingly without paſſions. It is not becauſe thoſe paſſions are not born; they have exiſtence, but, like Adam, they ſtill lie aſleep in the garden; they are not yet awakened to the joys of Paradiſe, and to the temptation of the forbidden fruit. Arouſe them, and the "*roar is up.*" In the ſame caſe, many a ſlumbering virtue may lie dormant in a man's heart. Take him to the Theatre, where all the various ills of life are reflected in a focus; if he have virtue, here its lethargy muſt end: it is called by ſympathy, and it muſt ariſe.

How often do we behold the hard and churliſh man weep over the grief of *Iſabella*,

Jane

Jane Shore has exhaled a ſigh from many a frail boſom. And how frequently have I witneſſed the gambler move uneaſily on his ſeat, and, at laſt, abruptly quit the houſe, at the repreſentation of the *Gameſter*! Repeat the impreſſion, and it muſt leave ſome traces on the ſoul. Inceſſant dropping of water will penetrate the hardeſt ſtone. Aſk common feeling, is it likely that on the ſame night in which the conſcience was ſo awakened, the gambler would immediately return to the dice-box? And if he ſhould, could he lift it without a thrill of compunction? Is it not notorious, that on thoſe evenings when *George Barnwell* is acted, the women of the town are very thinly ſeen in the Theatre?

Thus it may be traced, that Greece and Rome ſought to make the ſtage a ſchool for civil virtues. We are told that it has perverted that deſign. As no inſtitution of man is perfect; and as this aſſertion is allowed to be as true, as that death is the puniſhment of his fall; why is the Drama to be reproached becauſe ſhe alone has not eſcaped a part of the univerſal poiſon?

Which of the offspring of genius has not wandered from the onward path? Sculpture and painting, in the hands of the abandoned, have been proſtituted to obſcenity. Poetry has yet been thruſt lower in debaſement. Muſic has been degraded to the moſt diſgraceful purpoſes; and Philoſophy, that ſublime being, which, when led by the hand of Newton, marched the eternal round of ſpace, and drew up the adamantine curtain which had ſo long obſcured the univerſe; ſhe who, impelled by the immortal Locke, ſought through the infinite world of mind the incomprehenſible capabilities of the ſoul, till they conducted her from the ethereal ſpirit of men up to the everlaſting beatitude of Deity: this fair daughter of Heaven is now wreſted from the foot of that immortal throne where ſhe ſat adoring; and, under the influence of thoſe powers of darkneſs which have lately engloomed the world, is forced, by demoniac potency, to ſteep the aconite of death in her cup of inſtruction.

When ſo wide has been the miſchief, when the whole earth has corrupted itſelf,

where

where is the reaſon for demanding the infallibility of the Stage? The expectation is founded on ignorance or malignancy; indeed, when we conſider that the growth of guilt appears to have entwined itſelf ſo intimately with every other art, it is ſurpriſing to every unprejudiced judgment, that the Drama has contracted ſo little of the leproſy of the times. We ſee that the indecencies of Farquhar are paſſing away; and we may witneſs, if we will attend, the healing effects of the tender and moral ſcenes of Morton.

What I have advanced in juſtice to the Drama cannot be urged in favour of the Italian Opera. In common, thoſe performances are ill written; but even when otherwiſe, ſhould the beautiful and chaſte compoſitions of Metaſtaſio be preſented, the moral conſequence is loſt. The very nature of Opera (which firſt aroſe from an extravagant jumble of the uſual decorations attendant on the ancient Greek and Roman ſtage, added to the wild and incongruous muſic and pageantries which uſed to adorn the feaſts of the Moors of

Spain) is inimical to right impreſſion. Singing, in every ſituation of life, and under every ſtate of mind, is unnatural; and what is not natural cannot properly affect. The muſic may touch an abſtract feeling, but never can ſtrike the heart, from the force of the local character attempted to be identified before us. The Italian grimace is ridiculous, and ſhocking to taſte. The obſtacle againſt realizing the ſcene ſtands as ſtubbornly againſt Engliſh Opera. Whatever are the exertions of the actor, the abſurdity of the language ruins its effect. Who can be ſeriouſly intereſted about two lovers, who, when they are enjoined ſilence, and haſte to depart, immediately begin a long duet, and, in defiance of common ſenſe and propriety, wait, though peril menaces them, to finiſh it?

It would be trifling to mention any more of theſe dramatic outrages: their toleration has ever been the prognoſtic of a depraved taſte; and, in conſequence, corrupted morals. It is with concern that I contemplate the homage which the once manly ſpirit of Britain, now pays to the trivial and degraded

progeny of Italy. *Caro* Uticenſis may pour the ſublime energies of his mind to the ſolitary walls of the deſerted Theatre; while, to liſten to the peacock-ſcreams of ſome modern *Farinelli*, the Britiſh patricians will crowd in thouſands.

Pantomime, that legible poſterity of the vagrant *mimes* of Rome, is too contemptible for a very elaborate cenſure, though it ought to be cried down by every lover of good ſenſe and decorum.

Cornelius Nepos, indeed others, inform us, that in Greece, poets, orators, and crowned heads, have not diſdained to tread the ſtage. We know that Theſpis and Eſchylus acted in their own plays. Though the Romans, being a harſher people, were more reſerved in this reſpect, we learn from Tacitus and Juvenal, beſides numerous authorities, that during the republic, from the condition of ſlaves, good Actors have been enabled to purchaſe their own freedom; and, by their virtues, to win even the friendſhip of ſome of its nobleſt citizens. Under the emperors,

Players

Players roſe to many offices of profit, honour, and, indeed, confidence in the prince's favour.

That acting has been eſteemed by authors of gravity as a ſubject worthy of being regiſtered for the eyes and admiration of poſterity, let us only remember the names of thoſe men who have recorded to latter ages the merits of Eſopus, Polus, and Roſcius.

Roſcius was educated by men of the firſt rank in Rome, and was held out by them as an example of accompliſhment and grace to all the young nobility of the commonwealth. His acting filled all hearts, and dwelt on their memories as a ſtandard of excellence, by which they meaſured the magnitude of all other merit, however foreign from his own. Cicero, who was the boſom friend of this great man, bears teſtimony to this truth: "*Jamdiu conſecutus eſt, ut in quo quiſquis artifex excelleret, is in ſuo genere Roſcius diceretur.*" Indeed ſuch was the wonderful ſway which Roſcius held over the mind by his attitudes alone, that with

the energy of his countenance, added to the irreſiſtible expreſſion of his figure, he could pourtray every paſſion with ſo much truth and force, that Tully has often oppoſed his oratorial powers againſt the mute perſuaſion of the Actor: "*Et certe ſatis conſtat contendere eum cum Hiſtrione ſolitum, utrum ille ſæpius eandem ſententiam variis geſtibus effingeret an ipſe per eloquentiæ copiam ſermone diverſo pronunciaret.*"

Roſcius taught to the feelings of the orator, that there frequently was an eloquence in ſilence. This admirable Actor had the happineſs and glory of raiſing thoſe emotions in the hearts of his countrymen, which finally cauſed the return of Cicero from his long and wretched exile. He deſcribed, on the ſtage, the diſtreſs of the baniſhed Telamon, with ſuch a pathos and moving ſorrow, that the tears of the audience followed his words, and ſoon crowned the exertions of his affection and genius, by the recall of his friend.

It has been obſerved, that the members of any particular profeſſion reſpect themſelves

ſelves in exact proportion to the reſpect which is paid to that profeſſion by others. This has been well illuſtrated with regard to the profeſſors of the Stage: where they have been treated with eſteem, they have generally ſhown themſelves deſerving of the higheſt honours of the heart. We yet have names on record, the owners of which poſſeſſed rare qualities, both as actors and men: Burbage, the friend of Shakſpeare; and Lowin, the pupil of that immortal bard, and the "*gentle friend*" of Maſſinger, who wrote ſome ſweet lines before one of his beautiful tragedies, addreſſed to him, merely to "*profeſſe their love's antiquitie*;" Allen, ſo elegantly celebrated by the pen of Ben Jonſon, was not only one of the moſt eminent Actors of his time, but his perſonal merits were rated high as his abilities, which were then declared unequalled; he has left behind him a monument of his benevolence, in the hiſtory of that college which he erected at Dulwich in Surry, for the ſuperannuated of the Stage,

To enumerate the individual members of the Theatre, who deſerved and received the reſpect

reſpect of the moſt worthy and illuſtrious characters in the reign of Anne, and the ſucceeding ſovereigns, would be too prolix. We have the teſtimony of the elegant and refined Pope, who declares how "*dear*" many of its profeſſors were to himſelf, and to thoſe who knew the innate dignity of worth.

It would be tedious to run over every inſtance of the juſtice which has been paid to particular perſons. The firſt noblemen of the realm have placed coronets on the brows of ladies who have conducted themſelves with honour on the Stage. But theſe, I repeat, are only individual inſtances; they are a partial deviation from the common idea, not an abſolute change of the general opinion. At this preſent time there are men and women of the Theatre, who are received into the ſociety of gentlemen and ladies. But ſtill when this is done, it is always thought neceſſary to make an apology to thoſe gueſts with whom you mingle them. It is ſaid, that they are "good kind of people. He, or ſhe, are of genteel families;" or elſe, "that being

ſo high in his or her profeſſion, their figure in the world may paſs them into notice." But why is this apology to be made? We do not preface the introduction of any male or female author with a long liſt of their connexions, as an indemnification for introducing talents to a faſhionable circle. And where is the difference? Is not the fruit of a cultivated mind equally precious through whatever medium it meets our hands? Speculation would anſwer, Yes! But experience replies, No! Is this juſt? The profeſſors of any ſcience find that profeſſion a paſſport to carry them into the politeſt companies. The Philoſopher and the Poet are welcomed by the moſt elevated of ſociety, with a ſmiling countenance, and open arms; but the Actor, who gives to the flat picture of the poet, body and exiſtence; he who transfuſes the lays of the moraliſt into his own ardent boſom, and from thence pours them, warm and glowing, through the various runnels of the human heart; he is rejected; or received with a freezing brow, or half-averted frown.

Cold-breaſted mortals! It is you who plunge the young and eager mind into diſorder. It is you who quench the virtuous hopes of a youthful and ingenuous ſoul. You treat him as if he were baſe. Can you reproach him, that you find him ſo? Had it not been for you, he would have reſpected an upright fame. He would have conſidered his high talents but as pillars on which to have erected the reputation of an honourable man. But you have thruſt him from his rightful ſeat. You tell him that the direction of his genius is the mark of his degradation; and diſappointed, and inſulted, he is caſt upon the reſources of an injured mind. Can you be ſurpriſed that they ſhould fail an inexperienced boſom? His warm wiſhes ſigh for ſociety; other ſociety than that which your cruelty has ſtigmatiſed, and taught him to deſpiſe. He finds himſelf already an interdicted wretch. In chooſing his profeſſion, he has conſigned his intellects to infamy. He is ſtartled at the height of the precipice from whence he has unconſciouſly leaped. All his ennobling deſires are ſmothered by the hand of a

tyrannous uſurpation; and deſpairing of reſtitution, he no longer directs his elevating hopes to the acquirement of a reſpected name, but to the amaſſing of money, as one of the only certain means of paſſing him into the elegant world. He attends to the profits of his profeſſion, not to its purpoſe. He buys the ſociety of the reputable, by the bartering of his own talents. In the company of gentlemen he fills the corner of the table, to afford them a ſong; or receives a place in the dreſſing-rooms of the ladies as an inſtructor to their taſte, in the imitating for amuſement, that which, when exhibited for ſubſiſtence, has proved the deſtruction of his mind.

Barbarous proſcription! How the ſenſible heart burns at the obſtinate blindneſs which firſt denounced it! at the malignant and ſatanic pride by which it is upheld!

Let me aſk! Can any one of ye, loud anathematizers of the Player, tell me why his profeſſion is diſgraceful? What makes it ſo? Is it more criminal to exert intellect for the ſake of ſupport than for pleaſure?

If the thing be wrong, wrong can never be right; and wrong are they who have ever taſted of it. In the reign of Charles the Firſt, that very grave and truly regal prince, did not queen Henrietta, with a long train of nobility, perform maſques for the entertainment of his majeſty and the court? Thus ſhe, who was the wife of a king of England, and daughter to Henry the Great of France, did not diſdain herſelf to be, what now an ignorant chambermaid would dare to ſneer at. But Henrietta thought with Epaminondas, and, indeed, with every expanded mind, that it is not the occupation which ſtamps the man, but the man which gives value to the occupation. Epaminondas knew himſelf to be as much a hero when attending to the cleanſing of the common ſewers of Thebes, as when by his valour and wiſdom he repelled the enemies of that ungrateful city.

When preſent at one of our public Theatres, how do we ſurrender the nobleſt attributes of our ſoul to the influence of a being whom we ſcorn! He ſeizes our imagination by the animated verſatility with

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which he faſhions himſelf to the various ſhapings of the Muſe. He wins upon the inſinuating powers of volition by the ſweet ſemblance which he wears of compaſſion, and lovelineſs, and ſuffering. But when his own feelings imbibe all the fire of his character; when the ſentiments of fortitude, magnanimity, and mercy, ſtream from his breaſt in the glowing burſts of enthuſiaſm, our judgment ſanctions our emotions, and our hearts contemplate the Actor as the perfection of human art. We receive the moral into our boſoms, but we reject the fountain from whence it ſprings. We accept the gift, but we ſpurn the hand that beſtows.

Let us inveſtigate the abſolute qualifications of a fine Actor, and again inquire how far his denunciation is unjuſt. We have already ſeen how the Actor gives the living being to the fancied hero of the poet: he clothes deſcription with a body, and infuſes into it a ſoul. To the painter's faint copy of the impreſſion on the mind, he gives all the fervour of motion and grace. The unimpreſſive maxims of the philoſopher,

philoſopher, in his breaſt, heave with life and ardour; he feels them burn in his heart, and his lips breathe the language of perſuaſion.

Can theſe effects be born without a cauſe? Can the full ſwell of harmony be produced when the ſtrings have loſt the ſtrength which held them in concord? The man who can act the hero well, muſt poſſeſs penetration to diſcover what are the reigning attributes of the heroic character. A bold and creative fancy muſt accompany this acute perception, that he may fill, with a blended colouring, thoſe parts of the man which the deſcriber could only ſketch. He muſt reverence virtue, elſe its precepts will fade upon his tongue. He muſt feel the paſſions he would diſplay; for they are notes which never vibrate but by ſympathy: to ſtrike every chord at once, to make the lofty diapaſon reverberate through every exalted breaſt, the dignity of his own heart muſt ſtamp its majeſty upon the illuſion, to which he gives "*a local habitation and a name!*"

Klopſtock,

Klopſtock, that warm and elegant German poet, with many others of equal rank in mind, obſerves, that "the higheſt and utmoſt effect of genius is, to move the whole ſoul." Who has diſplayed more excluſive power to accompliſh this grand end than the Actor? He not only moves, but fixes. He diſturbs the ſoft indolence of our paſſions, merely to introduce, amid the ſweet confuſion, feelings and ſentiments worthy a home in the pureſt boſoms.

This is the Actor's province. He is the Archimedes that has found the ſpot from whence he can ſtir the world. While he ſtands there, he is abſolute; but when he quits it, he falls from the ſeat of gods into a chaos of gloom and miſery.

I have not drawn too dark a picture of the Player's ſituation. The very eſſentials of his profeſſion ſoften his ſenſibility, and render him liable to receive into his boſom arrows which might rebound from a harder mould. His art is derived ſolely from the cultivation of his mind, and unwearedly refining the ſources of emotion. Thus,

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the exuberance of culture is added to the original diſpoſition of the man; and for the pleaſure of a capricious public his ſoul is nurtured in a hot-bed, merely to bloom in wider fragrance at certain ſeaſons, and then is caſt out, entendered and ſhrinking, to a cold and inclement ſky.

How various are the means by which proud oppreſſion ſeeks to bow down the rights of the Actor to the duſt! How recent in the eyes of the public muſt be that tyrannous exerciſe of power which ſought to repay his labours with ingratitude and deprivation! Thoſe whom the exertion of his talents wrapped in the purple of proſperity, who from the ſacrifice of his midnight reſt ſlept in down and velvet; theſe voluptuaries, ſwilled with the fulneſs of wealth, and whoſe wanton potency diſturbed their golden ſlumbers; theſe aroſe from their epicurean eaſe, to caſt deſtruction on the head of that devoted mortal who now ſtands beneath their influence; and whoſe daily offerings cauſed that rich incenſe to float around the brows of his repoſing rulers, which now intoxicates their

ſenſes to ſtoop beneath their imagined god-head; and with a deſperate hand graſp at the ruin of that being, by whoſe exiſtence and exertion alone their airy heaven was raiſed, or can be ſupported. But, thanks to the noble principle of extenſive right which reigns in the boſoms of the patriot EIGHT! truth is oppoſed to power; and ſad muſt be the fact and precedent, if wealth and inſolence obtain the victory.

I will not mention names, becauſe I write not from partiality, but juſtice. Yet it muſt afford pleaſure to the beſt feelings of every honeſt heart, to behold the ſtruggles which ſome of the preſent profeſſors of the Theatres are now making to deſerve at leaſt the eſteem which is ſo ſparingly beſtowed. They have not ſuffered the haughty uſurpation of the reſt of mankind to trample upon their conſciouſneſs of worth; they feel their own dignity, and they do well to aſſert it. But how juſt would it be, if that ſpirit of levelling which has ſeized like a mania on almoſt every rank of ſociety, would alter its direction, and, by following the laws of nature, ſink the memory of its

madneſs, in the revival of reaſon! would it turn from the abſurd and never-ending litigation of agrarianiſm with regard to property, to the only region where the equalizing principle can with juſtice be exerciſed; would it extend to the republic of the mind: then we ſhould ſoon experience that peace in the ſublime reign of intellect, which the perturbed ſway of groſſer ſpirits now renders ſo wide a ſcene of noiſe and wretchedneſs.

Admit this—and if the world will yet acknowledge the voice of truth, it muſt admit it—and the Actor will again, as in the ſchool of Athens, be ſeated on the ſame bench with the poet, the painter, and the philoſopher. He will find himſelf again the aſſociate of ſuch men as Socrates and Pericles (if ſuch men are to be found). There are yet, philoſophers, warriors, and ſtateſmen; but I repeat again, the occupation is not the man.

Being reſpected by others, the Actor will learn to maintain the ſeat of his rights, by the upright direction of thoſe talents

which gained him an elevation ſo high. Conſidering himſelf as an object of conſequence, not as a mere vehicle for diffuſing the ſentiments of another, but as a being reſponſible by his life for the characters which he perſonates, he will take care to be what he ſeems. The virtues which he pours through ſociety, ſhall loſe nothing of their value by the channel over which they flow. The young will liſten to him with awe, when they are told that the Actor feels what he performs; that the precepts he declares influence his own principles; and that if you follow the hero from the ſtage to his cloſet, you will there find him, though diveſted of his robes and ſplendour, an upright and honourable man.

Reſtore to the Player the rank which heretofore kings and ſages have not denied him, and theſe effects will follow of courſe. Admit him to your acquaintance, your intimacy, your friendſhip; let him receive the gratifying graſp of eſteem, as he ſeats himſelf beſide your domeſtic hearths, amidſt the ſmiling eyes and joyous exclamations of your children; let him feel that

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he is beloved by thoſe whoſe love is precious, and he will repay the gift with intereſt, from the boards of that Theatre, which juſtice and beneficence have once more made only another title for a ſchool of morals!

Our young men will crowd to the Playhouſe as they do now; but not, as now, to lounge in the lobby, and ſhame Decency in her paſſage; but as did the youth of Sparta, thronging to the public tables, to imbibe wiſdom with the aliments of life, Pleaſure would here lead Virtue by the hand; and the breaſt muſt be hardened indeed, that would not receive her.

Inflamed with an honeſt zeal in the cauſe of a profeſſion, which, though diſgraced, ſo potently holds the plaſtic manners of the people in its graſp, I have thrown theſe few obſervations, warm from my heart, upon the paper. My motive muſt be clear to every mind that dives beneath the ſurface of reflection. And if thoſe minds are ingenuous, and prefer the revival of an old, ſalutary, and almoſt obſolete truth, to the retaining

retaining of a more modern, but ſtub-born error, I may hope to have their ſuf-frage and example in replacing the profeſ-ſors of the Stage in their appropriate ſphere. Intellect having again recovered the charter of Nature to maintain its rights, will cheriſh Virtue as the trueſt guardian of its rank, and the only unadulterated ſource of all its honours and extended power.

THE END.

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